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Kissinger Denies Seeing Korea Warning Memos

By Ron Sarro

Washington Star Staff Writer

Former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger testified today he never saw two "top secret-eyes only" memos to him from the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover warning of South Korean influence buying on Capitol Hill.

Kissinger said he recalls part of a third such secret memo from Hoover mentioning payments to a congressman, but does not recall other points made by the director that indicated there was a serious South Korean plan to channel money to American politicians.

He said the fact he did not see the memos was not important, since such memos were routinely screened by his staff, which determined which ones he needed to see or take action on.

The memos were written by Hoover in 1971 and 1972 and were sent to Kissinger in his capacity as assistant to President Nixon for national security affairs. Memos also were sent to the attorney general, John Mitchell.

MITCHELL HAS previously testified that he did not see two of the Hoover memos, even though his initials were found on one of them.

Kissinger appeared today before a House International Relations subcommittee headed by Rep. Donald Fraser, D-Minn., that is looking into the foreign policy aspects of Korean activities on Capitol Hill.

"I was aware there was Korean lobbying going on," Kissinger told the subcommittee. "I was aware there was other lobbying going on on the Hill and so was every congressman."

South Koreans were focusing on attempts to reverse U.S. plans to withdraw troops from their country, and such efforts so displeased Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird that "he was going to go to the State Department and complain," Kissinger said.

But Kissinger said he was not aware that bribery was involved until 1975, when an assistant secretary of state, Philip Habib, called his attention to a number of "bribery allegations."

Kissinger said he immediately took this up with President Ford, watched the situation at the president's direction, and finally passed on information to the attorney general he felt the Justice Department did not have. This triggered the formal investigation of South Korean bribery attempts.

"Intelligence agencies were very reluctant to make this information available to investigative agencies because of the sensitive nature of the sources," Kissinger said.

ON THE Hoover memos, Kissinger explained that he was not deeply involved with Korean affairs as the presidential national security adviser in 1971. That was the business of the State Department at that time, he testified.

"I never saw any of the intelligence reports which spoke of lobbying," Kissinger said.

Kissinger said he did not react to "top secret-eyes only" classifications by agents in the field because everyone would then think that would be the way to get his attention. "Top secret-eyes only is not such a rare classification," Kissinger said.

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